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## CONSTRUCTIVE STUDIES IN THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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### II. THE GENERAL SCOPE OF THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT.

#### DEFINITION AND PRINCIPLES.

§ 14. The Word "Prophet" and the Hebrew word of which it is a translation require consideration.

1. Does *pro* in "pro-phet" mean "before" or "for"? What is the meaning of the Greek word *phe-mi* from which the second syllable of "prophet" is derived?

2. Compare with this the word "pre-diction," which is of Latin origin, and note the difference.

3. Consider the meanings assigned the Hebrew root *nā-bhā'*, from which *nā-bhī'*, "prophet," comes; does it mean (a) "to bubble forth," the prophet being thus represented as one through whom prophecy bubbles forth, as the spring bubbles forth from the earth? or (b) simply "to speak" (*cf.* the Assyrian root, which means "to call, name"), the prophet being thus simply a spokesman? or (c) "to speak softly," "to be exalted" (*cf.* Arabic), thus representing the prophet as an involuntary speaker, one speaking under compulsion, as in an ecstatic vision?

4. Note the meaning of the word "prophecy" as used of Saul and others in 1 Sam. 10:5, 6, 10, 13; 18:10; 19:20-24; its use with music, the frenzy implied, the violence indicated; also the characterization of Elisha by Jehu's servants as "mad fellow," 2 Kings 9:11; and consider the relation between prophecy and insanity in their outward manifestation.

5. Consider the note in 1 Sam. 9:9 which refers to the introduction of the word "prophet" as a substitute for an earlier word "seer."

6. Note also that the word is used of an official class, characterized as "false prophets;" *cf.* especially Deut. 13:1-6; 18:20-22, and many places; *e. g.*, Isa. 28:7; Jer. 2:26; 4:9.

7. Decide in what sense Amos's denial (7:14) that he is a prophet or the son of a prophet is to be taken.

8. Consider the discredited position of the "prophet" in the days of Zechariah, as indicated in Zech. 13:2-6.

9. Note, on the other hand, the meaning of "prophet" called for in the statement (Exod. 7:1) that Aaron is to be a prophet to Moses (*cf.* Jer. 15:19).

See the commentaries on 1 Sam. 9:9, especially those of H. P. SMITH (1899), BUDDÉ (1902), and THENIUS-LÖHR (1898); and the Hebrew dictionaries, viz., BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS (1891 ff.), GESENIUS-BUHL (13th ed., 1899), and SIEGFRIED-STADE (1893).

See also REDSLOB, *Der Begriff des Nabi* (1839); EWALD, *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, pp. 8 f.; HUPFELD, *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Vol. III, p. 40; DELITZSCH, *Assyrisches Handwörterbuch*, p. 441; KUENEN, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 42 ff.; HOFFMANN, *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Vol. III, pp. 87 ff.; W. R. SMITH, *Prophets of Israel* (2d ed.), pp. 390 f.; OEHLER, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 363 ff.; MAYBAUM, *Die Entwicklung des israelitischen Prophetenthums*, p. 113; FLEISCHER in DELITZSCH'S *Genesis* (4th ed.), p. 552; SCHULTZ, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 264 ff.; WELLHAUSEN, *Composition des Hexateuchs* (3d ed.) p. 242; ORELLI, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 11 f.; BRIGGS, *Messianic Prophecy*, pp. 14 ff.; KÖNIG, *Der Offenbarungsbegriff des Alten Testaments*, Vol. I, pp. 73 ff.; GIESEBRECHT, *Die Berufsbegabung der alttestamentlichen Propheten* (1897); SMEND, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (2d ed., 1899), p. 80; KITTEL, *Prophetie und Weissagung* (1899); KÖNIG, *Das Berufsbewusstsein der alttestamentlichen Propheten* (1900); KRAETZSCHMAR, *Prophet und Seher im alten Israel* (1901); A. B. DAVIDSON in HASTINGS'S *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. IV, pp. 108 f.; CHEYNE, *Encyclopædia Biblica*, cols. 3853 f.; BEWER, *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, Vol. XVIII (1902), p. 120; W. R. HARPER, *International Critical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (1904), pp. 5 f.; and HOLZINGER (1898) and GUNKEL (1901) on Gen. 20:7.

§ 15. The Words for "Seer" and "Vision" also occupy an important place in prophecy.

1. Note the use of *rô'eh* in Isa. 30:10; 1 Sam. 9:9 ff.; 2 Chron. 16:7, 10.

2. Note the use of *hōzeh* in Am. 7:12; Isa. 30:10; Mic. 3:7; 2 Chron. 33:18; 2 Sam. 24:11; 2 Chron. 9:29; 29:30.

3. Note the use of "vision" in Isa. 21:2; 29:11; 28:18; Joel 3:1; Job 4:13; 7:14; 2 Sam. 7:17; Zech. 13:4.

4. Consider again 1 Sam. 9:9, and explain the significance of this change; when and why did the new word come in?

5. Observe that these words originally marked the method of receiving the divine communication, it being *seen in a vision*, that is, an ecstasy or trance (Dan. 8:13, 17, 26), or a dream (Isa. 29:7); but in time they came to designate the utterance or writing of the message, as in Jer. 23:16; Hab. 2:2; Hos. 12:11; Nah. 1:1; Isa. 1:1.

See on visions and similar phenomena: OEHLER, *Ueber das Verhältniss der alttestamentlichen Prophetie zur heidnischen Mantik* (1861); BAUR, *Der Prophet Amos*, p. 400; DUHM, *Die Theologie der Propheten*, pp. 86 ff.; OEHLER, *Theology of the Old Testament*, §§ 207, 209; KUENEN, *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 76-85; KÖNIG, *Der Offenbarungsbegriff des alten Testaments*, Vol. II, pp. 8-60; MAYBAUM, *Die Entwicklung des israelitischen Prophetenthums*, pp. 1-6; BRIGGS, *Messianic Prophecy*, pp. 6-10; RIEHM, *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, pp. 20 ff., 212 ff.; SCHULTZ, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 250 ff., 275-79, 281 ff.; ORELLI, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 4 ff.; MEINHOLD, *Prophetie und Schwärmerei* (1892); GUNKEL, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, pp. 323-27; W. R. SMITH, *Prophets of Israel*, pp. 219 ff., 421; BORCHERT, "Die Visionen der Propheten," *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1895), pp. 217 ff.; DILLMANN, *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, pp. 477 ff., 494; SCHWARTZKOPFF, *Die prophetische Offenbarung* (1896); SMEND, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte* (2d ed.), pp. 82 ff.; GIESEBRECHT, *Die Berufsbegabung der alttestamentlichen Propheten*, pp. 38-72; DRIVER, *Joel and Amos*, pp. 200 ff., cf. p. 126; MACDONALD, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. XX (1899), pp. 89 ff., 96, 109 f., 117; MORGAN, arts. "Trance" and "Vision," HASTINGS'S *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. IV; VOLZ AND CHEYNE, art. "Prophetic Literature," (§§ 19, 20), *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

§ 16. **The Prophetic Vocabulary** contains also other words deserving special study, among which are:

1. The word *ne'um*, translated "saith" in Ps. 110:1; this would be better rendered "utterance," "oracle" (cf. also in Ps. 36:1; Prov. 30:1), and really means "whispering," "murmuring;" it is used especially with divine names, e. g., Gen. 22:16; Isa. 14:22 f.; 30:1; 31:9; Hos. 2:15; 11:11; Am. 3:13; 4:5; 6:8; 8:3; Ezek. 13:6; 16:58; Jer. 2:22; 46:18; 49:5; Nah. 2:14; Zech. 13:2; but also with the name of a prophet in an ecstatic state, cf. Numb. 24:3, 15; 2 Sam. 23:1.

2. The word *massa'*, translated "burden," "utterance," "oracle."  
(a) Note the use of the verb (= "lift up") in Numb. 23:7; Mic. 2:44; Isa. 14:4, when the reference is to some formal or solemn utterance.  
(b) Examine the word in Isa. 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 2 Kings 9:25; Hab. 1:1. (c) Note, however, that in Jer. 23:33, 34, 36, 38 the use of this word is strictly prohibited.

3. The use of "word" (Heb. *dābhār*) is also to be noticed as a technical one, designating the utterance of the prophet, as distinguished from the "law" (*tôrāh*) of the priest, and the "counsel" of the sage (cf. Jer. 18:18).

4. The phrase "And Jehovah (or God) said," or "Thus said Jehovah," is frequently used to designate a prophetic utterance (cf. Am. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; 5:4; Hos. 3:1; Isa. 8:1; 37:33; 43:1; Jer. 3:11; 11:6; 13:1; Ezek. 6:11; 8:5; 30:13; Zech. 8:9; 11:15. Concerning this phrase, it may be noted (a) that it

does not indicate the method of speech employed by the deity, since it is used of all the methods of divine communication; (*b*) that in many cases it designates the prompting of the heart, the voice of conscience, and consequently is used by the false prophet (Jer. 28 : 2 ff.; 1 Kings 22 : 11) who, perhaps, really thinks that he is uttering the "word of God," and also of ideas which later experience shows God would not indorse; *cf.* the lying spirit placed by God in the mouths of the prophets (1 Kings 22 : 19-23); (*c*) that time was required to sift the alleged "sayings of God," and to determine whether, after all, they bore the divine stamp; observe the provision made for this in Deut. 18 : 22 f.

See especially BRIGGS, *Messianic Prophecy*, pp. 12-22; ORELLI, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 5-13; GIESEBRECHT, *Die Berufsbegabung der alttestamentlichen Propheten*; KÖNIG, *Das Berufsbewusstsein der alttestamentlichen Propheten*; VOLZ, art. "Prophetic Literature" (§§ 14 f.), *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

### § 17. Definitions of Prophecy.

1. *The Rationalistic School* of interpretation excludes from prophecy everything that points to guidance by a higher power, and then reduces it to the level of ordinary human composition. Prophecy, from this point of view, may be defined as a system of thought (*a*) intended to lift the people to an ethical conception of the deity; (*b*) advocated by men of various degrees of moral and intellectual attainment, some of whom were fanatics, others men of great spiritual endowment; (*c*) including coarse and extravagant pictures of the people's sins, and varied by prognostications of the future which were more likely to prove false than true.

Here may be classified such works as SPINOZA, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), chaps. i-iii; HITZIG, *Vorlesungen über biblische Theologie und messianische Weissagungen des Alten Testaments* (1880); RENAN, *History of the People of Israel*; and, with some reservation, KUENEN, *Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*.

2. *The Predictive School* of interpreters, on the other hand, ignores very largely any relationship between prophecy and history, treats prediction as the most important factor in prophecy, and demands an exact fulfilment in letter or spirit of every predicted utterance. From this point of view, prophecy may be defined as the foretelling, by information granted directly through revelation, of occurrences which were contingent, and which, therefore, were not to be foreknown by human wisdom.

To this school belong, for example: HENGSTENBERG, *Christology of the Old Testament* (1872-75); R. PAYNE SMITH, *Prophecy a Preparation for Christ* (1871); GLOAG, *The Messianic Prophecies* (1879); PEMBER, *The Great Prophecies concerning*

*the Gentiles, the Jews, and the Church of God* (1881); STANLEY LEATHES, *Old Testament Prophecy; Its Witness as a Record of Divine Foreknowledge* (1880); THOMAS NEWTON, *Dissertations on the Prophecies Which Have Remarkably Been Fulfilled, etc.* (1883); W. H. GREEN, *Moses and the Prophets* (1883).

3. *The Historical School* of interpretation places great emphasis upon the historical connections of prophetic utterances, relegates prediction to a less prominent position than is given it by the Predictive School, and endeavors to trace through the centuries the beginnings, the growth and climax, and the decay and death of this movement of Israelitish thought. From this point of view, prophecy may be defined as a special form of religious instruction, in which effort is made to illustrate and to formulate the principles in accordance with which the Ruler of the universe conducts his government of nations and of individuals.

As representative of this school, which is now dominant, may be cited: W. ROBERTSON SMITH, *Prophets of Israel*; CORNILL, *Prophets of Israel*; KIRKPATRICK, *Doctrine of the Prophets*; RIEHM, *Messianic Prophecy*; SMEND, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, MARTI, *Geschichte der israelitischen Religion*; MONTEFIORE, *Religion of the Ancient Hebrews*.

§ 18. **History in its Relation to Prophecy.**—Three points deserve attention:

1. A knowledge of Israelitish history is necessary for any proper understanding of Old Testament prophecy; still further, there is needed an acquaintance also with that wider Semitic history of which Israelitish history is only a part. This becomes evident in the study of such a prophet as Isaiah, whose voice was heard on all the great political issues at a time when Israel's interests were closely interwoven with those of Egypt and Assyria.

2. The history of a period is fundamental to the prophecy of that period, since the history lies back of the prophecy and supports it. Even more, the history produces the prophecy; the historical event, in any case, furnishes the situation which prophecy undertakes to interpret. Consider from this point of view the prophecies of Isaiah uttered in connection with the embassy of Merodach-Baladan to Hezekiah (chap. 39).

3. If prophecy has in it a divine element, then history has the same. If history is human—that is, determined by the will of man, characterized by the limitations of human weakness—so is prophecy. The prophet conveys a true conception of God's will, but he is limited in his work by the character of the language which he employs, by the ignorance and wilfulness of the people whom he addresses, and by

the weakness inherent in his own humanity, and inseparable from the situation in which he does his work.

§ 19. **The Time, Form, and Substance of Prophecy** are conditioned :

1. The *time* of utterance of a given prophecy was determined by the time of the occurrence of the event or experience which gave rise to the prophecy. If the event or experience had been postponed, the preaching of the particular truth taught by the event would have been postponed. Each truth was appropriately made known at a particular time in the history which, as it proceeded, furnished a basis for the announcement of that truth. Every crisis signified the promulgation of some new truth ; *e. g.*, Isaiah's doctrine of the inviolability of Jerusalem was announced in connection with Sennacherib's attempt upon the city.

2. The *form* of the prophetic utterance was also determined by the historical event out of which it grew. The same truth takes on varying forms in different periods. The form in every case finds its explanation in the particular circumstances with which it stood closely related. Consider, for example, the apocalyptic, enigmatical character of the prophecy of Dániel in the light of the tyrannical oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes, in whose reign it was written.

3. The *very substance* of prophecy was dependent upon and determined by the historical event. Amos preaches destruction in view of an approaching Assyrian invasion. Isaiah announces the doctrine of the remnant when Jerusalem's existence is threatened. Jeremiah's doctrine of individualism appears at the very moment when national existence is about to perish. When loyal Israel is languishing in captivity, the reproach and sport of her enemies, the doctrine of a suffering servant is presented. At this time, too, arguments for the oneness of God are urged more earnestly than before. At the time of the restoration, prophecy concerns itself with the rebuilding of the temple. The substance of prophecy cannot, in any case, be separated from the history of the prophetic people.

§ 20. **Prophecy's Relation to the Nation's Past, Present, and Future.**—Prophecy had to do with all three spheres of time :

1. *With the past*, when the speaker presents for the encouragement or the warning of his countrymen the record of God's dealings in former times with the nation and with individuals—*stories* of the nation's apostasy and consequent slavery; of a king's crime and the punishment which followed ; of a royal prayer and a miraculous deliverance ; of a prophetic mission and a city turned from sin, such as are found throughout Genesis, Exodus, Samuel, and Kings.

2. *With the present*, when the prophet describes the wickedness and iniquity which he sees on every side and rebukes it; or observes a true desire for righteousness and approves it—*pictures* of the corruption and debauchery existing among the ruling classes; of extortion and oppression practiced upon the poor; of faithlessness and skepticism toward the nation's God Jehovah; of peace and prosperity the result of obedience, such as occupy a large portion of the space of written prophecy. See, for example, Am. 3:9-15; 5:4-12; Hos. 4:1-19; Zeph. 2:1-3:7; Jer. 3:21-4:5.

3. *With the future*, when the prophet, acquainted with the laws in accordance with which the divine will acts, and knowing therefore that which must follow this or that line of conduct, directs his thoughts to the glorious future, with all its splendid prospects for the nation and its ideal government; or in tones of thunder depicts the divine judgment which must inevitably fall upon a land so full of corruption and idolatry, and leave it a scene of desolation. Cf. Isa., chap. 28; Am. 9:11-15; Ezek., chaps. 6, 7.

§ 21. **Prediction** occupies a large and important place in prophecy, and may be considered from the point of view of—

1. *Its immediate purpose*, viz., to influence the minds of the people directly addressed. Here it is important to observe (*a*) that every prediction grew out of two factors: one, the historical situation; the other, the body of principles received and applied by the prophets; (*b*) that prediction in almost every case was general rather than specific; (*c*) that general predictions were frequently applied specifically by New Testament writers, *e. g.*, Isa. 9:1, 2; cf. Matt. 4:14 ff.; Isa. 29:13; cf. Matt. 15:8 f.

2. *Its conditional character*. Study Jer. 18:1-10 and note: (*a*) When the prediction contained a threat, and the people for this reason gave heed to the words of the threat, the calamity threatened did not fall; in other words, the prediction remained unfulfilled; and (*b*) when the prediction took the form of a promise, and the people gave no heed to the words of the prophet uttering the promise, the thing promised was not given; in other words, the prediction was unfulfilled. The predictions of the prophet who was able by his preaching to turn the people from their sins were not fulfilled, the prophet's success rendering the fulfilment unnecessary; while on the other hand, the predictions of disaster made by a prophet who had failed to reach the hearts of the people were the predictions which received fulfilment.



3. *Its more distant purpose*, as shown by time, the New Testament writers, and human experience. This distant purpose (*a*) rested upon the fact that the prophets' words were based upon principles true for all time, and therefore capable of application to every situation which corresponded in general to the situation for which the words were originally intended; (*b*) presupposes the introductory and preparatory character of the history in connection with which the utterances were made; (*c*) is to be closely connected in every case with the immediate purpose; (*d*) is to be interpreted in the light of the fact that in many cases the prophets were setting forth lofty and inspiring ideals in highly poetic and figurative language, the exact realization of which in every detail is not to be expected; see, *e. g.*, Isa. 2: 2-4; 11: 6-9; Zech. 14: 16-21.

On predictive prophecy see BRIGGS, *Messianic Prophecy*, chap. ii; KUENEN, *Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*, chap. v; ORELLI, *Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 50-62; A. B. DAVIDSON in HASTINGS's *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. IV, pp. 120 f.; VOLZ, art. "Prophetic Literature" (§§ 16 f.), *Encyclopædia Biblica*; HOFFMANN, *Weissagung und Erfüllung* (1841); KITTEL, *Profetie und Weissagung* (1899).

§ 22. **The Prophet Himself** is to be thought of—

1. *As one of the people*, the product of the agencies at work in the nation, identified in spirit and life with his age, choosing one or another of the political parties of his times, and always speaking a message primarily intended for his contemporaries.

2. *As a reformer*, whose chief function was to improve the religious condition of his people, dealing with the sins of his day rather than with those of other periods, never speaking except to influence the lives and thoughts of those whom he addressed.

3. *As himself one of the objective factors* influencing his people and his age, representing ideas wholly in advance of his times, urging policies directly in contrast with those of his age, contending with an audacious courage against the tendencies of his times, and all the while shaping and molding these times.

§ 23. **The Prophetic Work** is also to be considered from the point of view of—

1. *The prophet's life* in each case, and his relation to the technical schools of the prophets which were in vogue. Some were professional prophets, among these the so-called false prophets; others refused to be so considered. Some were priests, especially in the closing periods of prophetic work. Some lived in the cities; others came from the country. Some were of royal blood; others, of the most humble

parentage. Some exercised the powers of king or dictator; others lived the life of martyrs and were placed in dungeons.

See 1 Sam., 10:9-12, 25 ff.; 11:14 f.; 13:8 ff.; 1 Kings 19:19 ff.; 20:35; 22:27 f.; 2 Kings 2:15 ff.; Amos 7:14 ff.; Jer. 1:1; 38:6; Ezek. 1:3; 4:14.

2. *His relation to the priest.* At first priest and prophet were hardly to be distinguished; later the prophet's high conceptions of God and life bring him into direct conflict with the priests of his times; after a time, prophet and priest join hands in promulgating the new law of Deuteronomy, the priest thereby gaining great advantage; still later, the priest with the written "law" takes the place of the prophet and his "word," the last prophets being themselves priests.

See 1 Sam., chap. 3; 7:5-11; Hos. 4:6-10; 5:1 ff.; Amos 7:10 ff.; 2 Kings, chaps. 22 and 23; Ezek. 1:3; 4:14; chaps. 40-48; Hag. 2:11 ff.; Mal. 1:6-14; 2:1-9.

3. *His relation to the sage*—one of sympathy and co-operation, although the prophet always represented the national point of view, while the sage stood for the universal.

See Prov. 29:18; Am. 5:10; Isa. 29:21; Prov. 11:21; and 20:7; cf. Jer. 32:18; and cf. CHEYNE, *Job and Solomon*, pp. 119 ff., 182 f.

§24. **Israelitish History, Literature, and Prophecy** share alike in the characteristics of the Israelitish development.

1. *Israelitish history*, whatever may have been the special divine relationship sustained to it, includes, on the part of its greatest leaders, actions of the most sinful character, and, on the part of the nation itself, actions and institutions of the most degraded character. It is the history of a nation, starting on the level of other nations, and gradually rising, through the influence of great leaders, to a more and more noble, more and more true, conception of God, and with every step upward leaving behind some belief or custom inherited from paganism which has become inconsistent with the higher ideal of God. This history exhibits the influence of the divine spirit—an influence exerted with all the strength of almighty power acting in consistency with other attributes, and working in the hearts of a people held down by sin. It is, in short, the story of a nation lifted little by little from the lowest condition of nomadism, and exhibiting at each stage of progress the weaknesses and sins common to peoples at that stage of advancement.

2. *Israelitish literature*, whatever may have been the special divine relationship sustained to it, contains different and differing accounts of the same event, including errors and inconsistencies in statement, if interpreted in the light of history and science, and shows a total disre-

gard for the common laws of history-writing accepted in our time. It is the literature of a nation passing through successive periods of national growth, each period making some new contribution toward a better knowledge of God and of his relationship to man. This literature exhibits the influence of the divine spirit—an influence exerted with all the strength of almighty power acting in consistency with other attributes, and working in the hearts of a people of Semitic blood, living during these periods of the world's history. The literature shared all of the merits and the demerits of the history. Whatever one was, the other was. It is, in short, the literature of a people brought, from time to time, into contact with the great nations of the world, absorbing from these nations good, as well as bad, and transmitting to the next age the accumulations of the past to be arranged and interpreted according to the ideas of each successive period.

3. *Old Testament prophecy* is both history and literature; the former, if viewed as a movement; the latter, if viewed as the product of that movement. The prophets made history as well as literature. As agents of the higher power which they firmly believed had especially called them to its service, they entered heartily into everything that constituted national life. At times they were actually in full control of the nation's development and for a period they almost exclusively constituted the literary class. Whatever is said of Israel's history may be said of Israel's prophetism; whatever is said of Israel's literature may be said of Israel's prophecy. It was a movement, in some respects the most eventful in the history of human thought, exhibiting more definitely than any other, perhaps, the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.